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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING PAPER

EAST TIMOR

BACKGROUND

For more than four centuries, until 1975, East Timor was a Portuguese colony. In the middle of that year, as a result of domestic political events in Portugal, the Portuguese abruptly withdrew from Timor, setting off a power struggle between several Timorese political factions. An avowedly Marxist faction known as Fretilin was better armed and achieved military superiority.

The ascendancy of Fretilin in an area contiguous to Indonesian territory alarmed the Indonesian Government, which regarded the Fretilin as a threatening movement. Responding to appeals from Fretilin's Timorese opponents, Indonesian military forces intervened in East Timor, overcame Fretilin's regular forces and, in 1976, formally annexed East Timor. It was declared Indonesia's 27th province in mid-1976.

Since that time, the Fretilin have waged a small-scale, hit-and-run insurgency, whose area and intensity of operations have been gradually circumscribed. By early 1983, fighting in East Timor had dwindled to only sporadic, small-scale incidents. Although Fretilin's current strength is not precisely known, most informed estimates are that there are only several hundred remaining armed insurgents, operating almost entirely in the sparsely populated, mountainous regions in the eastern part of the province.

In 1977, President Suharto declared an amnesty for any Fretilin willing to give up the armed struggle. In the ensuing years, hundreds of Fretilin have come down from the hills and been reintegrated into Timorese society. In July 1983 the Indonesian Government, stressing that its amnesty offer was still valid, announced that talks have been held in recent months with leaders of the remaining Fretilin, in an effort to end the insurgency. While these talks have been going on, fighting in East Timor has virtually halted, suggesting that the Fretilin engaged in the talks represent all or nearly all of the remaining insurgents.

It is impossible to precisely calculate the numbers of Timorese who may have died during 1975-83 as a result of the fighting. There is no credible evidence to support the more extreme allegations that there were hundreds of thousands of deaths. Recently a well-informed Indonesian Government official told foreign diplomats that the number dead on both sides since 1975 may total 60-70,000, the great bulk of the victims having died in the first years of fighting from inadequate medical care and food

rather than directly from battle. While we cannot confirm that estimate, it is consistent with our overall information about what has occurred in East Timor.

US POLICY AND PROGRAMS

The US accepts Indonesia's incorporation of East Timor without maintaining that a valid act of self-determination has taken place there. As have past administrations, the Reagan Administration places highest priority on trying to improve the welfare of the Timorese people. In pursuit of that goal, the Administration continues to make Timor one element in our overall diplomatic dialogue with the Government of Indonesia. The subject was discussed, for example, in the context of President Suharto's State Visit to the United States in October 1982. Challenges to Indonesia's sovereignty over Timor, however, would jeopardize the continuing, vital cooperation of the Indonesian authorities, without which both development in and international access to Timor would be curtailed.

The US wholly or partially funds three programs in East Timor. USAID is working directly with the Indonesian Government in implementing a $3.6 million malaria control project covering both East and West Timor, under an agreement signed in mid-1980. According to a recent on-site assessment of the project, it is going well and enjoying good cooperation and support from the local population.

USAID also funds a Catholic Relief Services (CRS)-run river basin agricultural development project in the western part of the province, near the town of Sare. This five year project, costing about $5 million, will increase food production and reduce the likelihood of the kinds of food shortages heretofore endemic to East Timor. The project was recently described by a USAID officer as "generating considerable momentum...basic change for the better is taking place."

Finally, the US has also provided significant contributions in support of the programs of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in East Timor. Last year, the State Department contributed $500 thousand, about a third of the money which ICRC requested in its "special appeal."

RECENT PROGRESS

During the past year, as a result of the efforts of the Indonesian Government and the involved international agencies, there has been important progress in each of the major areas of international concern over East Timor.

Development. The Indonesian Government has assigned the highest priority in its development program to East Timor, where it spends more per capita on development than in any other province in Indonesia. During 1982-83 it will spend more than $80 million on development and other programs in East Timor, an increase of more than 50% over the previous year (and more than six times as much as Portugal spent in 1974). Since the integration of East Timor into Indonesia, major progress has been achieved in the construction of roads, medical facilities, schools and housing. More than 5,000 non-Timorese Indonesians are now working as civil administrators in the province, supplementing a Timorese civil service of more than 8,000.

Recent visitors to Indonesia have taken note of this progress. Australian Prime Minister Hawke said in July, "Australia acknowledges and wishes to encourage the major efforts the Indonesian Government has been making to improve the situaton and to improve the conditions of life for the people of East Timor." Australian journalist John Hamilton, writing in the Melbourne Herald, contrasted his eight day 1983 visit to Timor with one he made eight years ago: "The difference between East Timor, 1975, is a little like trying to describe a picture show in which the first half is an adventure movie about a revolution in a banana republic followed by a long interval and a second movie which is a documentary about social change in an agrarian society."

Food situation. East Timor is a traditional food deficit area, with a fragile agricultural base utilizing traditional farming methods. The dislocation and damage wrought by the insurgency have further undermined agricultural production, as have recurring weather problems (including a severe drought in 1982). As a result of all these factors, East Timor has suffered periodic food shortages, including some locally serious shortages.

In mid-1982 there were reports that the food situation was deteriorating and that East Timor might be facing the threat of famine. Based on our constant monitoring of the situation since then, through both direct observation of US officials and reporting from other sources, it is our view that East Timor has not been in a famine situation at any time during the past year and that no famine threatens in the forseeable future. Some isolated areas of the province, particularly in the mountainous southeastern region, have experienced local food shortages. These areas have required, and have received, special food shipments, by sea, land and, on occasion, air.

Independent observers have confirmed this overall assessment. In December 1982 a Perth, Australia, newspaper, the West Australian, relying on the observations of its editor-in-chief who had just visited East Timor, editorialized that "reports of recent famine and starvation are without foundation." In his May 1983 Melbourne Herald article, Australian reporter John Hamilton wrote: "The most optimistic note concerns food production in East Timor. There is no famine, no food shortage now, and the late rains are expected to help the situation further."

International access. International access to East Timor has improved significantly in the past two years, though special permission is still required to visit the province. Three international organizations -- ICRC, CRS and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) -- have on-going programs in East Timor and enjoy regular access to the province. Officials of the State Department and the US Mission in Jakarta have visited East Timor three times during the past eight months, enjoying almost total freedom of movement.

Diplomats and officials of other governments have also visited East Timor more frequently. During 1983 the then Australian Defense Minister, the New Zealand Ambassador to Indonesia, the Singapore Defense Attache in Jakarta, the Papal Nuncio in Indonesia and several officials of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta have visited the province. An Australian Parliamentary delegation is scheduled to visit East Timor in late July or early August.

Media access to the province has also increased significantly. During 1982, journalists from the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Asian Wall Street Journal, the Far Eastern Economic Review, the Associated Press and Reuters, among others, travelled to East Timor. So far in 1983, in addition to the Australian press visitors aready cited, the following media representatives have been in East Timor: 25 Indonesian journalists in January, a Portuguese television team in February, the Secretary General of the Nepalese Journalists' Association in April and a Norwegian television team in May.

In responding to this greater flow of visitors, the provincial government has established a public affairs office, and an Indonesian domestic airlines, Merpati, has announced a plan to inaugurate regular commercial service to some sites in East Timor (Indonesia's major airlines, Garuda, has provided service to East Timor's capital, Dili, for several years).

Human rights. During the period 1975-81, human rights concerns centered on allegations of abuses (including indiscriminate killings) by Indonesian troops engaged in military operations against Fretilin and on the illegal jailing and mistreatment in custody of suspected Fretilin and sympathizers. Specific allegations of new abuses have dropped dramatically during the past two years (along with a concomitant drop in fighting). We are unaware of any specific allegations of these kinds of abuses for which there is credible evidence during the past year.

More recently, human rights concerns have centered on the detention of suspected Fretilin sympathizers on Atauro Island, off the north coast of East Timor. The Indonesian Government relocated several thousand Timorese to Atauro during 1981-82, apparently in an effort to preclude their providing support to Fretilin remnants in the mountainous regions surrounding their home areas. At its height during 1982, the detainee population on Atauro was between 4-5,000 people.

Persons detained on Atauro live in spartan surroundings, are housed in simple barracks and are almost wholly dependent on the Indonesian authorities for their food and medical care. Food and medical supplies have been in short supply at times, but close attention to this problem by the Indonesian Government and the ICRC have averted any critical nutrition or health problems. Atauro detainees are not, as some have alleged, kept in prison cells or behind walls or fences. They are free to move about their simple community and even set up food stalls or other small enterprises. They are assisted by Indonesian Red Cross personnel, utilizing supplies from the ICRC, whose personnel also visit the island. Representatives of the diplomatic community (including officers of the State Department and the American Mission in Jakarta) and journalists have visited Atauro several times during 1982-83.

In 1982, the Indonesian authorities announced a plan to close the Atauro facilities, by relocating those detained there to new resettlement sites on the Timor mainland. That program is now underway, with several groups of people already moved to resettlement sites throughout the province. The current detainee population on Atauro is between 2,000-2,500. An Indonesian official recently stated that it is his Government's intention to close the Atauro detention facilities during 1983.

Family reunification and repatriation. During the early years of the war in East Timor, some Timorese left the province

and resettled in Australia and elsewhere. The Indonesian Government has agreed in principle that close relatives of those people still in Timor may leave Timor to join them at their new homes. Since the 1983 visit to Indonesia of Australian Prime Minister Hawke, the pace of departures of these family members has increased. An Indonesian official recently stated that all of the remaining close relatives of those resettled in Australia would be permitted to leave Timor this year.

There are also several hundred Portuguese nationals remaining in East Timor, many of whom reportedly wish to be repatriated to Portugal. Some of these people were permitted to leave earlier this year, with the facilitative assistance of the ICRC. It is anticipated that additional groups will depart throughout the balance of 1983.

TIMOR AT THE UN

Each year since 1976, critics of Indonesia's actions in Timor have introduced resolutions in the UN General Assembly condemning the annexation of the territory and demanding that the Timorese be permitted to exercise their right of self determination. While the resolution has obtained a plurality each year, the margin of passage has gradually dwindled. Last year, the vote was 50-46, with 50 abstentions (the US voted against the resolution).

United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

CIDAC
Centro de Documentação

SEPTEMBER [illegible] 1983

Dear Mr. Hall:

Secretary Shultz has asked me to respond to your letter of August 19, 1983, concerning the situation in East Timor.

As your know, we have closely monitored the situation in East Timor since its incorporation by Indonesia, taking special note of those humanitarian questions which have been of international concern.

After several months when there was virtually no fighting in East Timor and contacts were apparently proceeding between officials of the Government of Indonesia and members of the Fretilin insurgency, we are concerned that fighting reportedly has again occurred at least in some areas. Initial reports are not conclusive about the events leading to the renewed fighting though in one instance a number of Indonesian soldiers were reportedly attacked and killed by insurgents.

We will continue to seek as much information as possible about the situation in East Timor, in line with our goal of doing what we can to support Indonesian and international efforts to improve the lot of the Timorese people.

For your information, I have enclosed a copy of a background paper we have recently done on the situation in East Timor. You will note that it was prepared before the recent resumption of fighting but otherwise represents our best current information on the situation there. I hope it will be of use to you.

If there is any further information I can provide, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Alvin Paul Drischler
Acting Assistant Secretary
Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs

Enclosure:
As Stated.

The Honorable
Tony P. Hall,
The House of Representatives.